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ABSTRACT

A study examined th phonics instruction that five basal reader series provide from kindergarten through grade six. The five basal programs (designated as Series A through E) that were examined are both similar and dissimilar in the recommendations they make for phonics. One series covers as many as 129 letter-sound correspondences; another covers 87. All five series pay considerable attention to consonant sounds in their kindergarten manuals and to numerous ways to spell long vowel sounds. Two of the five series deal with blending as a means for identifying words; another uses blending to emphasize whatever sound is receiving attention. Either way, the blending is done mostly by the teacher, not the children. The other two programs, neither of which identifies sounds directly, do not refer to blending. An omission in all five series is suggestions for teaching children how to use letter-sound correspondences with flexibility. Four of the five series teach a few generalizations for dividing words into syllables; the fifth series omits generalizations for syllabication. All five programs fail to deal with phonics in a way that makes its value for reading apparent to children. Instead, the programs succeed in demonstrating how phonics instruction can be a waste of time. Findings reveal the wide gap that exists between the phonics that is taught and the recommendations that are made for dealing with new vocabulary. (Seven tables of data and five figures are included.) (MG)

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Technical Report No. 496

PHONICS INSTRUCTION IN NEW BASAL READER PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This report describes the results of an examination of five basal reader series, analyzed for the purpose of learning about the phonics instruction that each provides from kindergarten through Grade 6. Initially, the report describes instruction concerned with letter-sound correspondences, generalizations for these correspondences, and generalizations for syllabication. Because of the growing support for teaching children how to blend sounds to produce words, that topic follows. Covered next is the question: Does the phonics that is taught function with the words that are said to be new?

The most important--as well as the most disappointing--finding of the analyses has to do with the wide gap that exists between (a) the phonics that is taught and (b) the recommendations that are made for dealing with new vocabulary. Such a gap not only turns phonics instruction into an end in itself but also deprives children of the opportunity to experience the value of phonics for decoding words that are unfamiliar visually. Why authors of the respective manuals chose to teach what was found and, further, why what is taught comes close to being ignored when new words are identified are two of a number of questions that the analyses failed to answer. Why *mis*information is provided about some letter-sound correspondences and why, in addition, terms that figure in phonics instruction are used incorrectly, are two more questions that lack obvious answers.

PHONICS INSTRUCTION IN NEW BASAL READER PROGRAMS

In 1987, the California State Department of Education released to publishers of basal reader programs the guidelines that would be used when programs were selected in the fall of 1988. That the publishers would do everything possible to ensure that their materials reflected California's specifications was never in doubt for two reasons. First, California buys a large number of textbooks and, second, it is among the 22 states that have a "centralized, state-level textbook evaluation and selection process" (Farr, Tulley, & Powell, 1987).

Why more than just publishers expressed interest in "the California initiative" is explained by two of the specifications: literature-based programs in which all the language arts are integrated. The fact that these preferences were being endorsed by whole language advocates who, at the same time, were criticizing basal materials with equal vigor, resulted in considerable speculation about the nature of forthcoming programs.

In contrast, California's explicit request to terminate phonics instruction by the end of Grade 2 generated little if any interest. This was not surprising, considering that a decade-long concern for comprehension had taken phonics out of the main spotlight. Equally important, the most vocal advocates of whole language programs virtually ignored the question of how to teach children about letter-sound relationships (Scott, Hiebert, & Anderson, 1988).

Actually, it was the likelihood that phonics would not be a major concern of those making decisions for basal series that made phonics, for me, a topic worth investigating. This was the case because I believe that phonics is *one* important part of an instructional program and, as such, ought to be taught well. I also think it is difficult to defend the use of materials that teach phonics in the early grades, then ignore that instruction at subsequent levels. This explains my interest in learning what the new series do with phonics beyond Grade 2. Whether the growing support both for the direct identification of sounds and for teaching blending would be taken into account was still another question that merited attention (Adams, 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Beck & McCaslin, 1978; Johnson & Baumann, 1984; Lewkowicz, 1980; Williams, 1980).

Questions to be Considered

Once a decision was made to find out what the new basal series do with phonics, the following questions were selected to guide the analyses.[1]

Kindergarten-Grade 2

1. Which letter-sound correspondences are taught?
2. Are sounds explicitly identified?
3. Are generalizations for syllabication taught?
4. Are generalizations for letter-sound correspondences taught?
5. Does blending sounds to produce syllables and words receive attention?
6. Are opportunities provided for children to use what is taught with new words?

Grade 3-Grade 6

1. Does phonics instruction continue beyond Grade 2? If so, what is taught?
2. Are students encouraged to use phonics with new words?

Basal Reader Programs Analyzed

Basal programs with 1989 copyright dates gradually became available starting in the summer of 1988. Two criteria were used to select the series that would be analyzed. First, a series had to be a new rather than an updated program. Second, a series had to be among the best selling programs, as they are the ones that have the best chance to be influential. Based on the two criteria, five series were selected.[2]

The fact that 1989 basal reader programs are larger than their predecessors is reflected in Table 1. Anyone familiar with the materials is also likely to conclude that they are the most expensive ever produced. Their cost, in fact, was featured in an article in the *Wall Street Journal* in the fall of 1988, which was entitled, "Publishing Houses Battle for Shares of Coveted California Text Market."

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

Findings about phonics instruction in the five selected series will be described in a way that follows the sequence of the questions listed earlier. The initial segments of this report, therefore, focus on kindergarten (K) through Grade 2.

Letter-Sound Correspondences

The use of fairly quick ways to identify the letter-sound correspondences that are taught was prohibited by a combination of facts. To begin, information that the publishers provide in scope and sequence charts and in the index for each manual is not always correct. In addition, instruction described as "new" sometimes deals with a topic covered earlier. The latter problem was a major one for the beginning levels. Specifically, even when as many as 21 consonant sounds are taught in a K manual, that instruction is ignored in the preprimer (PP) manual. (The fact that the K component in these series--in spite of its size and cost--is isolated from subsequent levels is discussed elsewhere [Durkin, 1989, 1990].) Problems such as these made it necessary to examine manuals page by page in order to learn which letter-sound correspondences receive attention. What was found is shown in Tables 2-6, which, along with commentary about each one, are in an appendix to this report. It is recommended that these data be examined now.

[Insert Tables 2-6 about here.]

Generalizations

Because English has more speech sounds than there are letters to record them, generalizations about factors that affect letter-sound correspondences are a customary part of phonics instruction (e.g., When there is one vowel letter in a syllable that ends with a consonant [*him*, *mascot*], the vowel usually stands for its short sound.). Therefore, identifying the generalizations that the five series teach to help children assign sounds to certain letters was another objective of the analyses.

How these generalizations are taught in some of the series assumes that children know how to divide unknown words into syllables (e.g., When a word has two parts and the last letter is *y*, the *y* usually stands for /ē/, as in *hurry*).[3] For that reason, the generalizations that are taught both for letter-sound correspondences and for syllabication are presented together in Figures 1-5. For each series, generalizations are listed in the order in which they receive attention. The level at which they are first taught is indicated, too.

[Insert Figures 1-5 about here.]

In the series themselves, "introductory instruction" means different things. In Series A and C, for example, "introduce" describes instruction being offered for the first time at a given level. Series B, on the other hand, uses symbols to explain whether an instructional objective is receiving attention for the first time in the series or for the first time at a given level. The fact that all the series provide some *mis*information about "initial instruction" is one of the reasons why such careful analyses were necessary.

What Is and Is Not Done: Common Patterns

Before the focus shifts to other facets of the phonics components in the five basal programs, this section considers the five series as a whole in relation to what is done with letter-sound correspondences and generalizations. What the series have in common is the primary concern.

One of the first shared features that emerged as manuals were being analyzed is the large amount of space allotted to various ways to spell long vowel sounds. This seems like a questionable use of instructional time when it is remembered that replacing a predicted vowel sound (short) with an alternative sound (long) whenever the predicted sound fails to produce a recognizable word is all that is required to decode words like *kind, wild, old, roll,* and *colt*. Admittedly, this assumes that children are taught *how* to use what they are learning with flexibility. Unfortunately, the assumption is not valid for the programs examined. Series E does make an attempt to show teachers how to model flexible decoding; however, the effort is flawed in two ways. First, the words in the modeling segments usually are some that children know. Although using familiar words initially could be defended as a way to begin, their continued use is not likely to make modeling either realistic or productive. The other flaw is that the text in the modeling segments is so dense as to make its use by teachers virtually impossible. Nonetheless, Series E is to be commended for at least showing that modeling is an ideal way to explain both the meaning of, and the need for, flexible decoding.

By now, the need for correct terminology in basal manuals ought to be apparent. After all, more than 20 years have passed since linguists highlighted what seemed like reading educators' confusion about terms that refer to speech sounds (e.g., *blend, diphthong*) and others that refer to letters (e.g., *digraph, cluster*). Nonetheless, all the examined programs misuse terms--Series C and E to a greater extent than the other three. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find in manuals recommendations to teachers to do the impossible: pronounce digraphs; underline blends; listen for, and blend, letters. Admittedly, agreement does not exist about the terms that ought to be used in the course of offering phonics instruction or even about whether terms like those named above *should* be used. Even so, it is hardly controversial to state that if a decision is made to teach certain terms, they ought to be used correctly.

What should also be used with accuracy are descriptions of what have traditionally been called "*r*-controlled vowel sounds." The reference is to the special effect that the sound for *r* has on vowel sounds when *r* follows a vowel in a syllable. Even though linguists state that the vowel sound plus the sound that *r* records stand for a blend of two sounds in words like *her, car,* and *for*, authors of the examined manuals ignore that conclusion and teach, instead, that in a word like *for*, the *o* and *r* represent "a vowel sound."

As is characteristic of everything done with phonics in the five programs, recommendations are never made to synthesize intermittently the large amount of information that is provided about vowel sounds--for instance, that there are long and short vowel sounds; that (according to one series) there are two long *u* sounds; that *y* stands for vowel sounds; that a vowel plus *r* record a vowel sound; and that something called the *schwa* also stands for a vowel sound. When all this information is placed in juxtaposition with everything that is taught about the many ways to spell long vowel sounds, the only conclusion that can be reached is that the phonics components in the five examined series are needlessly complex.

In spite of the complexity, the major concern of manual authors seems to be one-syllable words. Four series do teach a few generalizations for syllabication; nonetheless, Figures 1-5 clearly show that single-syllable words are the primary focus even though it is multisyllabic words that are the primary problem for decoders.

Also questionable is the frequent mix of both root words and inflected and derived words to illustrate generalizations. The mix shows disregard for two facts. First, generalizations about letter-sound correspondences describe spelling patterns for the syllables of root words. Second, inflected and derived words should be considered in the framework of morphological, not phonological, units.

As questionable as some of the instruction in the examined manuals may be, the exercise sheets for phonics are flawed even more. (The number of exercises at the K through Grade 2 levels is shown in

Table 7, along with number of charts available.) Although examining practice sheets was not part of the formal analyses, certain of their features were too obvious to miss because they are repeated so often. Features that hardly allow for meaningful phonics practice include the following:

1. Words used in instruction are reused in practice exercises.

2. Multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank exercises are so generous with semantic cues and, at times, with helpful pictures, that it is impossible to know what a child used to select a word to complete a sentence.

3. Correct answers are often transparent. For example, if an exercise is focusing on the significance of a final *e* for the sound of the previous vowel, all the correct answers are words ending in ***e***.

4. Often, the number of items on a sheet is so small as to eliminate the possibility of its providing diagnostic information.

The questionable nature of so many of the exercises, coupled with the fact that they sometimes contradict information provided during instruction, make it necessary to ask not only about who prepares the workbook and blackline master pages but also whether they are sufficiently knowledgeable about phonics to have that responsibility.

[Insert Table 7 about here.]

Blending

It seems logical to think that an unequivocal answer could be given to the question, Do the five series teach how to blend sounds to produce syllables? With the exception of Series B, that is not the case. Actually, Series B can be dismissed from the present discussion with a single statement: It does not identify sounds directly nor does it do anything with blending.

Series C comes close to adhering to the same pattern. It does not identify sounds apart from words--with one exception. For all practical purposes, it can also be said that Series C does not teach blending. However, it does direct teachers to have children "emphasize" certain sounds as they pronounce words. Because the meaning of "emphasize" is ambiguous, so too are directions such as: "Have children pronounce *for*, emphasizing the final vowel sound."

When blending is considered, Series A is different from the other four. It uses blending to identify sounds. The blending, referred to as "saying a word slowly," results in a number of problems.

To begin, the blending recommended often distorts a word's pronunciation. When attending to the long sound of *o*, for instance, teachers are supposed to produce each of the sounds in the word *close* "slowly." Because of the distorted pronunciation that is the consequence of the suggestion, one has to wonder why direct instruction is not used--for example, "One of the sounds for the vowel letter *o* is /o͞/."

A similar question is prompted by what is done with some consonant sounds in Series A. To illustrate, when the blend that *qu* represents is the focus of instruction, the manual's suggestion is to pronounce the word *queen* slowly. The manual signals how to do that with the letters *qu-ee-n*. Because the recommended blending isolates /kw/, it is only natural to wonder, why not just tell children that *qu* can stand for the sounds /kw/, as in the word *queen*?

When a letter like *x* is dealt with in Series A, problems mount; for now teachers are asked to do the impossible. Specifically, in order to identify the blend that *x* records in final position, teachers are directed to say the word *box* slowly so that children can listen for the sounds that *x* represents at the end. Recommending the impossible is even more apparent in the directions that Series A gives for teaching the digraph *-ng*. Now, teachers are told to "model the blending strategy" by pronouncing *song* "the slow way." The letters *s-o-n-g* specify the "slow pronunciation."

Although blending occurs frequently in Series A, it is the teacher who does the work. At no time, for example, are children given the opportunity to blend sounds to decode *un*familiar words. Instead, the teacher blends and the children either (a) listen for a certain sound, or (b) pronounce the word after the blending is done. All this can be illustrated with what the II^2 manual in Series A suggests for teaching the correspondence between *ph* and /f/.

Teachers' adhering to manual recommendations write *elephant* on the board. They then point to *ph*, after which they "blend the sounds of the letters together" as they read the word "slowly." While doing this, they point to each letter in *elephant*. The next suggestion in this manual? "Have children read the word with you." Practice consists of helping children read aloud *telephone* (which was taught earlier) and *photo*. Whether the help recommended includes blending sounds is not clarified.

In Series D, authors clarify as early as the introduction to each manual that blending is an essential skill for decoding. And scattered throughout all the manuals from the readiness (R) level to the Grade 6 level are notes to teachers, reminding them about the importance of direct instruction for blending.

At first, it appears that the expressed enthusiasm for blending will be matched by instruction for blending. As early as page 123 in the R manual, teachers are shown how to demonstrate blending three sounds as a means for reading *Sam*. Afterward, children repeat the blending. Forty pages later, the teacher is directed to demonstrate blending three more sounds to decode *sad*. Again, children do what they heard the teacher do. All this is repeated for *dad*. Still later in the same manual, children are asked to blend sounds as a way to read *sat* and *Tad*.

Early in the first PP manual in Series D, the teacher is directed, first, to blend the two sounds in *eat* and, second, to have the children read *eat*. The letter *m* is then placed at the beginning of *eat*, and the children are asked to read the new word. If this cannot be done, the teacher blends the sounds in *meat* and asks the children to read it. Twenty-four pages later in the manual, another note appears about the importance of blending but none is done. Instead, the page has children work at reading *sat*, *mat*, and *Nat*, and *an*, *man*, and *tan*. It is taken for granted that everyone will be able to read the words; at least nothing is suggested--not even blending sounds--if problems occur.

In the second *PP* manual in Series D, another note about the importance of blending is on page 16, which is concerned with "word building" activities. These have children put together letters named by the teacher, which make words. In each case, children are asked to read the words, not blend the sounds. Again, ability to name the words is assumed. (The note on page 16 about blending states that the word building activities "contribute strongly to the development of blending skills." Nine more of these activities are in the manual, none of which do anything with blending.)

What was just described for the second PP in Series D also describes what is in the third PP manual, the primer (P) manual, and the first reader (FR) manual. That is, notes to teachers about the importance of blending appear from time to time, as do word building activities that do nothing with blending.

In the II^1 manual, one note about blending was found. At the II^2 level, blending is neither mentioned nor practiced.

To sum up, what Series D does with blending can be described as much to do about very little. Stated differently, it does more preaching than teaching.

As Table 6 and Figure 5 showed earlier, Series E offers more phonics instruction than the other four programs. It also identifies sounds directly--even some like /ng/. Blending, however, is not among the topics covered except at the R level. Intermittent attention in the R manual goes to blending sounds "the slow way" (*aaammm* for *am*, *rrraaannn* for *ran*) and "the fast way." The fast way is saying the word. Subsequent to the R level, the assumption of Series E is that knowing the sounds that the letters in an unfamiliar word represent allows automatically for knowing what the word is. This questionable assumption is reflected in all the manual segments that have teachers model decoding.

Phonics Instruction Beyond Grade 2

As has been suggested, the five programs offer either little or no phonics instruction subsequent to Grade 2. Series C, in fact, ends phonics instruction in the II[1] manual.

Although Series A reviews four consonant clusters in its III[1] manual, new instruction is absent. At the III[2] level, Series A discusses stressed syllables for the first time. All that is done in its 930-page Grade 4 manual is what is allotted to a review of "long word decoding" on three separate pages. The brevity of the review makes it necessary to ask whether the function of the three pages is to provide review or allow for assigning three exercise sheets.

Series B calls the attention it gives to *r*-controlled vowel sounds in the III[1] manual "new instruction;" actually, it is a review of what was taught in the II[2] manual. What *is* new instruction at the Grade 3 level are five ways to spell /aw/: *a* (*call*), *aw*, *au*, *ou* (*bought*), and *o* (*moth*). The III[1] manual also teaches how to pronounce final, unstressed syllables spelled with a consonant plus *le* (*able*), or with a consonant plus *el* (*label*). All this is reviewed in the III[2] manual, which marks the end of phonics in Series B.

In Series D, 17 letter-sound correspondences are reviewed in the first unit of the III[1] manual. One generalization is also reviewed: The first syllable of a two-syllable word often ends with a long vowel sound. After III[1], nothing is reviewed or taught.

In Series E, 19 letter-sound correspondences are said to be taught in the III[1] manual. In fact, however, all are covered earlier. In the III[2] manual, a generalization for syllabication is taught--one that turns syllabicating words into an end in itself. The generalization is: If a word has a vowel and a consonant in the middle, divide the word before the consonant and pronounce the first syllable with a long vowel sound. If the word does not make sense, divide after the consonant and pronounce the first syllable with a short vowel sound.

Phonics and New Vocabulary

Anyone familiar with basal programs knows that manuals list words said to be new in the selections children read. Because the only reason to teach phonics is to enable children to cope on their own with unfamiliar words, the most important question addressed in the analyses of the five series is how the phonics they teach functions with the vocabulary they use.

In Series A, disregard for what is taught about letter-sound correspondences is apparent as early as the R level, which is when words are first introduced--16 in all. Even though the R manual constantly encourages teachers to tell children that learning about letters and sounds will help them read words, the only time a reference is made to earlier instruction (*c* = /k/) is when *can* is introduced. With the remaining 15 words, nothing is said about the connection between their spelling and pronunciation even though 19 consonant sounds were taught earlier.

That the chasm between phonics instruction and the development of reading vocabularies persists throughout Series A is one conclusion of the analyses. A brief description of what is done with new words in Series A will show why this conclusion is warranted.

For every selection, a chart in the manual lists each new word, after which a sentence is printed that includes the word. (At the PP level, new words are on cards; what is done with them, however, is essentially the same.) Teachers are directed to read the sentences and identify the new words. (For unexplained reasons, the II[2] manual begins by having children read "the context sentences and identify the new words." Soon, directions revert to those that have the teacher do the reading.)

After the teacher reads the new words, attention goes to their meanings with the help of questions referred to as "strategies." With the word *adventure*, for instance, questions like, "Have you read any adventure stories?" "What is the most exciting adventure you have had?" are catalogued as STRATEGY: PRIOR KNOWLEDGE. Until level III[1] is reached, some questions are categorized as STRATEGY: DECODING, even though decoding provides no help with meaning. Questions about

the word *fix*, for example, are classified this way. The questions are, "What vowel sound do you hear in *fix*?" "Whom might you call if you needed something fixed?"

The word *fix* can also serve to illustrate the unusual way in which phonics functions with new vocabulary in Series A on the relatively rare occasions when it is used. On a page that precedes the one on which *fix* is listed as a new word, children learn about the sounds that *x* stands for in final position. It is thus logical to think that *x* will be singled out when attention goes to *fix*. But that is not the case. Instead, as was just stated, the question about *fix*--after the teacher reads it--is, "What vowel sound do you hear in *fix*?"

The lack of coordination between phonics instruction and new vocabulary in Series A is also apparent when certain words are said to be "new" when, in fact, they figured prominently in earlier phonics lessons. It should be noted that similar misrepresentations are in Series B. In this case, however, they are harder to track because the text on manual pages is excessively dense. Tracing what is done from page to page, therefore, is difficult.

What is impossible for Series B is reaching a conclusion about how children actually deal with new vocabulary, starting at the PP level. (In the R manual, all words are directly named by the teacher.) A description of manual recommendations should explain why there is this dilemma.

First, new words are listed. Each is also underlined in a sentence. Children are supposed to read the sentences silently, after which individuals read each one aloud. (Manuals direct teachers to remind children about the "multiple word-recognition strategy." This includes using contexts, the sounds that letters represent, and known word parts.) If children have a problem reading a new word, the teacher is supposed to provide "hints" to help. At the PP level, for example, the hint for *big* is: "Begins like *bird*. Tells the size of the boat." By Grade 4, hints omit attention to letter-sound relationships. At this and subsequent levels, only meaning-dominated help is recommended. This is the case even with regularly spelled words that should be easy to decode. For the word *shrill*, for example, the "hint" offered is: "This word describes a high-pitched sound."

Presumably, enough has been said to explain why a conclusion cannot be reached about how students using Series B actually cope with new words. Whether letter-sound relationships ever enter into their efforts is anybody's guess.

Series C divides its new vocabulary into three categories: key words, special words, and decodable words. (The latter category is confined to grades 1-3.) The only attention that goes to new vocabulary focuses on the key words, described as "critical" for comprehending the next selection children read.

The attention given key words, which are listed on a chart, starts with encouragement to the children to read, or figure out, as many as they can. Although teachers are urged to give children the chance to explain how they figured them out, manuals are explicit in stating that "This is not the time to expand skill instruction." Once children have their say, the teacher reads all the key words, after which manuals offer suggestions for practice.

Skill instruction in Series C, which includes phonics, comes after a selection is read. Sometimes, but not as often as could be done, one or more of the key words that received attention earlier figure in a phonics lesson. At times, other words in the selection are used, too. Or children themselves may be asked to look in the selection for words that illustrate what is being taught. It should be noted, however, that if what is being taught has significance for any of the key words in the next selection, children are never reminded of what they recently learned. Apparently, this is viewed as adhering to the principle: no skill instruction when key vocabulary receives attention.

Series C concludes phonics instruction at the II^{1} level. That marks the end, therefore, of the connections just described between phonics and words students are reading.

As indicated earlier, a quick look at Series D suggests this is a program that takes phonics seriously. A quick look at Figure 4, on the other hand, suggests that the little that is taught is not likely to allow for proficient decoding.

Also to be noted is that what *is* taught does not function with new vocabulary in any explicit way. For instance, when blending receives attention at the earliest levels, it is never recommended as a means for helping children deal with new words in the selection they are about to read. Further, when word building activities have direct relevance for some of the words said to be new, teachers are never encouraged to show the connections. Even when words that are "built" and named earlier show up as new vocabulary in a selection, the repetition is not acknowledged.

What does occur with new vocabulary in Series D remains basically the same until Level II[2] is reached. Some of the words are named by the teacher; others, called "decodable," may be named by the children or the teacher. The uncertainty is rooted in manual directions that tell teachers to help with decodable words by pointing out known letter-sound correspondences or, if needed, by pronouncing the word.

Like Series A and Series B, recommended help with new words in Series D moves increasingly away from spellings to meanings. In a Grade 2 manual, for example, teachers are told that they can learn about pupils' ability to use "new phonics elements" by asking questions about new words. In spite of that recommendation, however, the question suggested for a word like *gentle* is, "What word is the opposite of *mean*?" Another look at Figure 4 will show why relying on help that is rooted in meanings rather than spellings may be a necessity.

Starting at the III[1] level and continuing through Grade 6, Series D divides new vocabulary into "mastery" and "nonmastery" words. The former, defined as words that will be tested, receive most of the attention. In fact, nonmastery words are simply named once by the teacher. With the "to-be-tested words," directions are to give students the opportunity to pronounce them; however, encouragement to use what is known about letters and sounds is absent.

Series E is the program that attends to blending only at the R level. At that level, blending is used by the teacher--not the children--to introduce new words whenever all their sounds have been taught. For the word *did*, for instance, teachers are advised to "stretch and connect the sounds together: *d-iii-d*." When *will* is introduced, on the other hand, teachers identify it directly and then review the initial letter and the sound it represents.

From the PP level through Grade 2 in Series E, words listed under "Introducing New Vocabulary" are divided into two groups: decodable and nondecodable. Underneath the lists are segments labeled "Applying New Decoding Skills" and "Reviewing Decoding Skills." In the first, teachers are told to read certain of the new words and, as they do, to review something taught recently. The second segment is basically the same except that fewer words receive attention. Even though the "apply" and "review" segments do not take all the new words into account--both "decodable" and "nondecodable" words are ignored--the next segment in the manual defines them all, even when meaning is not likely to be a problem.

Starting in Grade 3 and continuing through Grade 6, the concern in Series E is for new words described as "tested." In spite of all the phonics that this program teaches, the attention given to the words that will be tested concentrates on meaning. How their pronunciation is achieved is never considered.

Summary and Conclusions

As this report has demonstrated, the five basal programs that were examined are both similar and dissimilar in the recommendations they make for phonics. One series, for example, covers as many as 129 letter-sound correspondences; another, 87. All five series, on the other hand, give considerable attention to consonant sounds in their K manuals and, later on, to numerous ways to spell long vowel sounds.

Two programs identify sounds directly; one does this, in fact, even when direct identifications are impossible. The three remaining series attend to sounds in the context of words, although one of the three does identify consonant sounds directly throughout its K manual.

Two of the five series deal with blending as a means for identifying words; another uses blending to "emphasize" whatever sound is receiving attention. Either way, the blending is done mostly by the

teacher, not the children. The other two programs, neither of which identifies sounds directly, do not even refer to blending.

An unfortunate omission in all five series are suggestions for teaching children how to use letter-sound correspondences with flexibility--a skill that is mandatory for successful decoding. Had this important ability received the attention it merits, lessons dealing with something like six ways to spell a long vowel sound could have been deleted.

Four of the five series teach a few generalizations for dividing words into syllables; some of the recommended statements, however, make generalizations useful only if a child is already able to read a word. The fifth series omits generalizations for syllabication, even though some of the generalizations it recommends for letter-sound correspondences assume that children know how to divide unknown words into syllables. Actually, both what is and is not done with syllabication in all the programs strongly suggests that those responsible for phonics were not entirely sure of what they *ought* to do. Another more verifiable conclusion is that what *is* done is anything but systematic.

One more conclusion that persisted throughout the analyses has to do with the failure of all five programs to deal with phonics in a way that makes its value for reading apparent to children. Even when the phonics that has been taught allows for the use of spellings to achieve the pronunciations of new words, authors of manuals bypass the opportunity to make phonics something more than an end unto itself. And, even though nobody wants phonics instruction to continue throughout the grades, so, too, should nobody find it desirable to have teachers in Grades 3-6 naming new words when their spellings and pronunciations match in predictable ways.

For me, the wide and persistent gap that exists in all the series between phonics and new vocabulary prompts yet another conclusion, namely, that the programs succeed admirably well in demonstrating how phonics instruction can be a waste of time. Stated differently, anyone opposed to phonics will find in these materials ample evidence to support their position.

Admittedly, the only reliable way to evaluate the phonics components in the five series is to assess the decoding ability of children whose teachers use one of them and work with phonics and new vocabulary in ways that mirror manual recommendations. To do that, however, an assessment instrument would have to be constructed because the series themselves do not allow for knowing whether or how children use phonics with unfamiliar words. This is so for several reasons. First, the phonics that is taught enters into suggestions for dealing with new vocabulary either minimally or not at all. Second, words used for phonics instruction are routinely reused in subsequent manual segments that are said to provide for review, maintenance, and reteaching. Unexpectedly, many of the same words also figure in exercise sheets said to provide for practice in using what has been taught. In the end, therefore, children receive considerable practice in reading words, not in decoding them. How well such children *can* decode remains questionable.

For some, this report may have raised questions about what is done with phonics in previous editions of basal programs. Actually, the only analysis comparable to the present one that has been reported was done by Beck and McCaslin (1978), who looked at eight series, Grades 1 and 2, that had copyright dates ranging from 1973 to 1976. Their selection of materials was based on two considerations. First, they had to be used with "compensatory education students," defined as "children who will not learn to read easily." Second, the selected programs, as a group, had to be materials that "employ different approaches to beginning reading." It should be noted that Beck and McCaslin carried out their investigation at a time when publishers felt it was necessary to claim that their materials taught more phonics earlier than did the materials of competitors. Perhaps this explains why Beck and McCaslin report very detailed findings about what is taught when.

One of their findings duplicates what was learned in the present study: "There is no outstanding consensus of the ideal number of (letter-sound) correspondences to present" (p. 17). Other conclusions that are the same include the following:

1. Some programs identify sounds directly; others do not.

2. Some teach blending; others do not.

3. Some of the programs that identify sounds directly teach blending; others do not.

Given the findings in the present analysis of basal materials, it is also appropriate to note one of the recommendations that Beck and McCaslin make: Children should be given "repeated opportunities to apply learned correspondences and blending to the reading of words in connected text" (p. 72). That such advice is hardly disputable seems clear. Nonetheless, even though other reading educators have made the same proposal over the years (e.g., Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Reutzel & Daines, 1987; Venezky & Johnson, 1973), the advice seems to have had little impact on current basal programs. In fact, what *did* influence the decisions made for phonics in the five examined series remains unclear in spite of the large amount of time that was spent on analyzing and comparing them.

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Footnotes

[1]The analyses were concerned with what the new series recommend for helping children decode unfamiliar roots; however, those responsible for phonics in these programs used more than roots whenever it seemed convenient to do so. For instance, when attention goes to *y* standing for /ɛ̄/, roots (*happy*) and derivatives (*curly*) are often mixed when illustrative words are provided.

[2]Reading programs known for the early attention they give to phonics (e.g., Distar and Open Court) are not among the programs that were examined.

[3]The wording used for generalizations is not always repeated verbatim. Care was taken, however, to cover the essential points and to keep the flavor of the original wording even when it was not the best. Similarly, words selected to illustrate a generalization are not always the ones found in manuals. In this case, it seemed better to use the same illustrative words when generalizations from different manuals cover the same content.

Tables

Table 1

Number of Pages in Manuals: Kindergarten - Grade 6*

Series	K**	R**	Grade 1			Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
			Preprimers	Primer	First Reader	II[1]	II[2]	III[1]	III[2]			
A	681	146	533	435	401	633	619	641	612	919	918	983
B	579	615	600	472	526	652	662	725	692	910	902	923
C	481	146	471	369	357	439	395	512	546	794	787	778
D	477	257	698	389	406	623	612	696	651	985	933	941
E	341	219	459	331	223	395	385	398	401	680	688	705

*Excludes introductory material, scope and sequence charts, appendices, word lists, glossaries, and the like.
**K = Kindergarten, and R = Readiness.

Table 2

Series A: Phonics in K-II[2] Manuals

Vowel Sounds	/ā/	/ă/	/ē/	/ĕ/	/ī/	/ĭ/	/ō/	/ŏ/	/ū/	/ŭ/	/o͞o/	/o͝o/	/au/	/oi/	/ou/	/er/	/or/	/ar/	/ə/
Spellings	a-e	a	-ee	e	i-e	i	o-e	o	-ue	u	oo	oo	au	oi	ou	-er	or	ar	a-
	-eigh		-ie		-igh		-o(ld)		-ew	o	-ue	u	aw	oy	ow	-ear			
	-ai		-ey		-i(nd)		-o(ll)				-ew		-a(lk)			-ir			
	-ay		-ea		-i(ld)		-o(lt)						-a(ll)			-ur			
			-y		-ie		-oe						-a(lt)						
					-y		-oa						-a(lse)						
							-ow						-o						
							-ou												

Consonant Sounds	/b/	/k/	/d/	/f/	/g/	/h/	/j/	/l/	/m/	/n/	/p/	/kw/	/r/	/s/	/t/	/v/	/w/	/ks/	/y/	/z/
Spellings	b	c	d	f	g	h	j	l	m	n	p	qu-	r	s	t	v	w-	-x	y-	z
		k		-gh		wh-	g-		-mb	kn-			wr-	c						
		-ck		ph			-dge		-mn	-gn										

Consonant Sounds	/ng/	/sh/	/th/	/ʜ/	/ch/
Spellings	-ng	sh	th		ch
					-tch
					-t(ure)

Some Commentary: Series A

Like all the examined series, this one teaches consonant sounds ($N = 19$) at the K level. All are directly identified. For unexplained reasons, the review of the sounds in the R manual does not identify them explicitly. When the same sounds are reviewed once more at the PP level, the first six are directly identified whereas the others are not. Subsequently, no sound is identified except as it is realized in words.

Another inconsistency was identified in what Series A does with "the long *u* sound." At various times, the sound is referred to with four different symbols: /ū/, /o͞o/, /u/, and /yo͞o/. In addition, even though manuals state repeatedly that words like *cube* and *tune* have the same vowel sounds, teachers are told in one isolated manual segment to "briefly mention" that the letter *u* in *use* has a "slightly different sound" than the letter *u* in *tube*.

What is done with the digraph *th* provides further evidence of inconsistency. The objective of the initial instruction for *th* states explicitly that it stands for two sounds, as is illustrated in *thick* (voiceless sound) and *these* (voiced sound). From that point on, however, *th* is treated as standing for one sound. Illustrative words either have the voiceless sound only or are a mix of the two sounds.

Like the summary prepared for the other series, Table 2 is, at times, more correct than the content it summarizes. What is done with *x* can serve to illustrate discrepancies. Series A deals with *x* initially at the PP level. Both initially and subsequently, *x* in words like *box* and *fix* is said to stand for one sound. Table 2, on the other hand, correctly indicates that *x* stands for a blend of two sounds, /k/ and /s/.

For whatever reason, the attention that Series A gives to the *schwa* sound is confined to words in which it occurs in an initial syllable and is spelled with *a*, as in *away* and *along*. What makes this treatment not only limited in value but also "interesting" is that Series B does the same thing. Series B adds to the problem later with an overstatement: The *schwa* sound is the sound of the vowel in unstressed syllables. Reading such a statement, one has to wonder, What about words like *stampede, maintain, solo, invent, employ, austere, window, exile, barley,* and *picnic,* none of which have a *schwa* sound?

One of the last letter-sound correspondences that Series A teaches is *ph* = /f/. This is covered at the II[2] level. What accounts for the decision in Series A to teach ph = /f/ when it does is unclear, given the fact that no words either in the previous selection in the reader or in the selection that children read next include this digraph.

But answers to a large number of questions are not transparent. For instance, Series A uses the term "soft" to refer to sounds for *g* and *c* (*cent, gem*). Earlier, the equally traditional term to describe two other sounds for *g* and *c*, "hard," is not used. More questionable is why the two sounds for *g* and the two for *c* are never dealt with together both to review the sound taught earlier and to compare it with the additional sound. Actually, this characteristic is a pattern in all five series: Encouragement to teachers to make comparisons, to show contrasts, and to bring together what is related comes close to being totally absent. Instead, the tendency is to treat topics as if each was unrelated to all the others.

Table 3
Series B: Phonics in K-II[2] Manuals

Vowel Sounds	/ā/	/ă/	/ē/	/ĕ/	/ī/	/ĭ/	/ō/	/ŏ/	/ū/	/ŭ/	/o͞o/	/o͝o/	/oi/	/ou/	/er/	/or/	/ar/	/ə/	/air/	/ear/
Spellings	a	a	e	e	i	i	o	o	u-e	u	oo	oo	oi	ou	-ear	-ar	ar	a-	air	-ear
	a-e		ea	-ea	-ie		oa			-ou	-ew		oy	ow	-er	-oar			-are	-eer
	ai		-ee		-igh		-oe				-ou				-ir	-oor			-ear	
	-ay		-ie		i-e		o-e				-ue				-ur	-or				
			-y		-y		ow									-ore				
			-ey																	

Consonant Sounds	/b/	/k/	/d/	/f/	/g/	/h/	/j/	/l/	/m/	/n/	/p/	/kw/	/r/	/s/	/t/	/v/	/w/	/ks/	/y/	/z/
Spellings	b	k	d	f	g	h	j	l	m	n	p	q-	r-	s	t	v	w	-x	y-	z
		c	-dd	ph-			g-	-ll		-gn		qu-	wr-	-ss	-tt					-zz
		-ck		-gh			-ge			-gn				c-						s
		-lk					-dge			kn-				sc-						
														-ce						

Consonant Sounds	/ng/	/sh/	/th/	/th/	/ch/	/hw/	/nk/
Spellings	-ng	sh	th		ch	wh-	-nk

Some Commentary: Series B

Sounds are never directly identified in Series B. Instead, words illustrate whatever sound is receiving attention. This may explain why so much space in the earliest manuals is allotted to having children listen for certain sounds in spoken words. (Manuals in this series are scripted. That is, teachers are told what to say when instructing. The large amount of text on manual pages raises a question, however, about how the scripts could ever be used, should a teacher want to use them. An alternative--using a script to get suggestions--would take considerable time.)

As many as 26 sounds are taught at the K level: 21 consonant sounds and 5 short vowel sounds. Because no additional sounds are introduced until the P level, it seems reasonable to ask, Why the big rush? (As Table 1 showed, the R and PP manuals in Series B have over 1,200 pages combined, many of which review the sounds covered in K.)

How certain letter-sound correspondences are dealt with in the K manual also has to be questioned. At first, for example, the sound for *x* is said to occur initially in the word *x-rayed*, even though the short sound for *e* is also taught. In the same manual, *q* is said to stand for the sound heard at the beginning of *queen*. The latter instruction is partially corrected in the FR manual, which teaches that it is *qu* that records the initial sound. This instruction is further corrected in Table 3, which shows that *qu* stands for a blend of two sounds. (Incorrect instruction about letter-sound correspondences is a major flaw in any series which assumes that children can hear individual sounds in words, thus do not need to have sounds directly identified.)

Part of what Series B does with the *schwa* sound was described in the Commentary for Series A: It is spelled with a and it occurs in the initial, unstressed syllable of words like *away*. This instruction is in the II[2] manual. In the same manual, 138 pages later, an instruction segment has two stated objectives that deal with words like *better* and *winner*. The first is to teach a generalization for dividing such words into syllables. The other objective pertains to "the *er* sound," which is symbolized in the statement of the objective with /ɘr/. Still later in the same manual, this "*er* sound" is reviewed; now, however, the focus is on the fact that the vowel sound in the second syllable of words like *better* and *winner* is "the schwa sound." At no time is any reference made to what was taught earlier about the *schwa* sound in words like *away*.

It must be acknowledged that Series B does a little better than the other four in relating what is taught at separate times. For example, it compares the hard and soft sounds for *c* and *g* when the soft sounds are taught. It also compares long and short vowel sounds by using contrasting words like *kit* and *kite*. Nonetheless, like the other four series, considerable attention goes to various spellings for vowel sounds. Children are expected to remember, for instance, that the long *o* sound can be spelled *o, oa, oe,* or *ow*. Why Series B authors chose not to review that *ow* records /ō/ when they teach that *ow* also represents /ou/ is unclear. Even more puzzling is why the two correspondences are dealt with separately when both are reviewed *on the very same page* in a FR manual.

Table 4
Series C: Phonics in K-II[1] Manuals

Vowel Sounds	/ā/	/ă/	/ē/	/ĕ/	/ī/	/ĭ/	/ō/	/ŏ/	/ū/	/ŭ/	/o͞o/	/o͝o/	/au/	/oi/	/ou/	/er/	/or/	/ore/	/ar/
Spellings	a-e	a	e	e	i-e	i	o	o	u-e	u	u-e	-oo	au	oy	ou	ir	or	-oor	ar
	-ai		-y	ea	-y	-y-	ow				oo		aw	oi	ow	er			
	-ay		-ie		-ie		oa				-ew		ou			ur			
	-ea		-ee		ei						-u					or			
	-ei		ea		i														

Consonant Sounds	/b/	/k/	/d/	/f/	/g/	/h/	/j/	/l/	/m/	/n/	/p/	/kw/	/r/	/s/	/t/	/v/	/w/	/ks/	/y/	/z/
Spellings	b	c	d	f	g	h	j	l	m	n	p	qu	r	s	t	v	w-	-x	y-	z
		k		-ff			-dge	-ll	-mb	kn-			wr-	-ss			wh-			s
		-ck		ph-			g-							c-						

Consonant Sounds	/ng/	/sh/	/th/	/ŧh/	/ch/	/nk/
Spellings	-ng	sh	th		ch	-nk
					-tch	

Some Commentary: Series C

With one exception, this series does not identify sounds apart from words. The exception is /f/ when it is taught as the sound that *ph* represents. This occurs in the first manual for Grade 2, after which new phonics instruction ends. The unexpected shift to a direct identification of a sound makes one wonder how other sounds would have been dealt with had phonics instruction continued. It also raises the questions, Who writes manuals? Is sufficient attention given to coordinating separate manuals?

Why the correspondence between *ph* and /f/ receives attention when it does is unclear. Although two words in the selection children read just before they learn about *ph* are *telephone* and *elephant*, none of the words in the selections that make up the rest of the II[1] reader include this digraph.

The early departure of new phonics instruction in Series C also makes one wonder why such a commonly occurring sound as the *schwa* is ignored even though, as Table 4 shows, manuals in the program attend to *un*common spellings for vowel sounds.

The care taken by those responsible for the phonics segments to avoid identifying sounds explicitly--with the one exception--is not matched by equal care in how sounds are portrayed. Examples of flawed information and terminology follow.

1. At the K level, *q* is said to stand for the beginning sound in *quilt*. At the PP level, *qu* is said to record the initial sound. Finally, at the FR level, *qu* is correctly identified as the letters that stand for the initial sounds in a word like *quilt*.

2. In the K manual, *x* is said to stand for the beginning sound in *x-ray*. This is retaught at the R level. By the time the PP level is reached, the focus shifts to *x* in final position. Now it is said to stand for the final sound in a word like *box* when, in fact, *x* represents the last two sounds.

3. After the long sounds for *a*, *e*, *i*, and *o* are identified, they are dealt with in the context of the CVCe spelling pattern. When it comes time to attend to the long sound for *u* within the framework of the same pattern, the word selected to highlight the sound is *cube*. Nonetheless, the three additional examples offered are *tube, tune,* and *prune*.

4. The attention that consonant clusters receive in Series C is both incorrect and inconsistent. On one and the same page, for example, a cluster such as *sp* is described as standing for both one sound and two sounds. Elsewhere, a cluster composed of three consonants (*str*) is described as standing for *the sound* heard at the beginning of a word like *street*. On still other pages, blends (instead of clusters) are said to stand for sounds. Equally noticeable are references to such processes as "blending letters" and "circling blends." Although every one of the examined series misuses terms, Series C is the worst offender in this regard.

Table 5
Series D: Phonics in K-II[2] Manuals

Vowel Sounds	/ā/	/ă/	/ē/	/ĕ/	/ī/	/ĭ/	/ō/	/ŏ/	/ū/	/ŭ/	/o͞o/	/o͝o/	/au/	/oi/	/ou/	/er/	/or/	/ar/	/air/	/ear/
Spellings	ai	a	e	e	i-e	i	oa	o	u-e	u	oo	-oo	a(l)	oi	ou	-er	or	ar	air	ear
	-ay		ea	-ea	-i(ld)		ow				u-e		a(ll)	oy	ow	-ir	-oor		-are	-eer
	a-e		-ee		-i(nd)		o-e				-ue		aw			-ur	-ore			
	a		-y		-y		o						au			ear				
	eigh		-ie		-ie		o(ld)						-augh			-or				
			ei-		-igh								-ough							

Consonant Sounds	/b/	/k/	/d/	/f/	/g/	/h/	/j/	/l/	/m/	/n/	/p/	/kw/	/r/	/s/	/t/	/v/	/w/	/ks/	/y/	/z/
Spellings	b	c	d	f	g	h	j	l	m	n	p	qu-	r	s	t	v	w	-x	y-	z
		-ck	-dd	-ff			g-	-ll	-mb	-nn			wr-	c-	-tt					-ze
		k		-gh				-le		kn-				-ss						
				ph-																

Consonant Sounds	/ng/	/nk/	/sh/	/th/	/t͟h/	/ch/	/hw/	/shən/	/ən/
Spellings	-ng	-nk	sh	th		ch	wh-	-tion	-en
						-tch			

Some Commentary: Series D

Series D teaches 19 consonant sounds at the K level. Wisely, the sounds that *x* records are not included. When *x* does receive attention at the FR level, it is considered only in final position, as in *box* and *fix*. The two sounds that *x* represents in such words are described as if they were but one sound, namely, "the /ks/ sound."

Unlike other series, Series D deals not with *q* but with *qu*. Again, however, the manual states that *qu* stands for "the /kw/ sound."

Another difference in this series is not only the acknowledgement that *th* records different sounds in words like *the* and *thin* but also the consistent use of words--with just one exception--that correctly illustrate the two sounds.

Although it is likely that many children do not hear that *the* and *thin* start with different sounds, it is equally safe to assume that most do hear different vowel sounds in words like *cube* and *tune*. For that reason, it was encouraging to find that Series D states explicitly that the sounds *are* different. Series D chooses to teach that each sound is "the long sound for *u*." Because this decision makes *u* different from the other vowel letters, one has to question why teachers are not encouraged in the scripted manual to do more than just state that /ū/ is the long sound for *u* and /o͞o/ is the long sound for *u*.

Even though Series D explicitly advocates the direct identification of sounds, such blends as /nk/ and /ng/ are identified *in*directly by having children pronounce the sounds recorded by strings of letters like *-ink* and *-ing*. Unlike Series E, therefore, it does not have teachers do the impossible: "Say /ng/." On the other hand, the assumption seems to be that "the /ks/ sound," which *x* represents in final position, *can* be pronounced apart from words.

As should be clear by now, none of the series discussed thus far deal correctly with the *schwa* sound: that it is like a short *u* sound, that it can be recorded by all the vowel letters, and that it appears frequently in unstressed syllables. In Series D, /ə/ is never taught alone. Instead, teachers are directed to have children listen for "the /ən/ sound" that the letters *en* stand for in *kitten, children,* and *legend*. Series D also teaches that the letters *-tion* stand for "the /shən/ sound." Earlier, words that end with a consonant followed by *le* (e.g., *little* and *apple*) are said to end with a syllable that stands for "the /l/ sound." Presumably, the reference here is to syllabic *-l*. However, what is stated in a manual suggests that with a word like *little*, the initial and final sounds are the same, which hardly is the case.

Nor is it the case that *who* and words like *wheel* and *whisper* "begin with the same sound." This is said to be the case when the digraph *wh* is reviewed.

Table 6
Series E: Phonics in K-II[2] Manuals

Vowel Sounds	/ā/	/ă/	/ē/	/ĕ/	/ī/	/ĭ/	/ō/	/ŏ/	/ū/	/ŭ/	/o͞o/	/o͝o/	/au/	/oi/	/ou/	/er/	/or/	/ar/	/ə/	/air/	/ear/
Spellings	-ay	a	e	-e	i-e	i	o	o	-u-e	u	-oo	-oo	-a	oi	ou	-ir	-or	ar	a	-air	-eer
	-ai		-ee	-ea	-ie		ow		-oo	-oo	-ew	-ou	-augh	oy	-ow	-ar	-ore		e	-ear	-ear
	a-e		e-e	-ai	-y		-ou		-ew		-ue	-u	-au		-ough	-or			i	-are	-ere
			-ie		-i(ld)		-ough		-ou		-u-e		-aw			-er			o	-ere	
			-ie-e		-i(nd)		-oa				-ou		-o						u	-eir	
			ei		-igh		-o-e						-ough								
			-ei-e				-o(lt)						-ou								
			-ey				-o(ld)														
			-y																		

Consonant Sounds	/b/	/k/	/d/	/f/	/g/	/h/	/j/	/l/	/m/	/n/	/p/	/kw/	/r/	/s/	/t/	/v/	/w/	/ks/	/eks/	/y/	/z/
Spellings	b	k	d	f	g	h	j	l	m	n	p	qu-	r	s	t	-ve	w-	-x	x-	y-	z
		c	-dd	-ff	-gg		g-	-ll	-mb	gn			wr-	-ss							-zz
		-ck		ph-			-dge			kn-				c-							-s
		ch-		-gh																	
		-q																			

Consonant Sounds	/ng/	/sh/	/th/	/ʜ/	/ch/	/nk/	/hw/	/sk/
Spellings	-ng	sh	th		ch	-nk	wh-	sch-
		-ss-			-tch			
		-ti-						

Some Commentary: Series E

As Table 6 makes obvious, the large number of letter-sound correspondences that Series E teaches results in a difficult, complex program. While preparing Table 6, it was often hard to remember words that illustrate some of the correspondences taught. While doing the analysis itself, it was sometimes necessary to outline the content of a lesson because phonics segments often cover much material quickly.

Even when phonics instruction is commendable, it is often flawed with poor workbook exercises. For example, one lesson in Series E teaches a spelling pattern that suggests a long sound for the letter *u*: CVCe. Because a spelling pattern suggesting a short sound was offered earlier, the lesson correctly uses contrasts--for instance, words like *cub-cube, us-use,* and *cut-cute*. All the other illustrative words for /ū/ are consistently correct: *huge, fuse,* and so forth. Following the helpful lesson, a workbook page with a total of three items is supposed to be assigned. The statement at the top of the page ("Long *u* can have the sound of *u* in *tune*.") unexpectedly contradicts what was just taught. Children are asked to fill in blanks in three sentences with words that have the long *u* sound. Correct answers are *mule, tune,* and *flute*. So much for the good instruction.

Like Series D, this one identifies sounds directly. However, unlike those who prepared Series D, authors of this series do not make distinctions between sounds that can be identified apart from words with a certain amount of accuracy and other sounds that cannot be produced in isolation. To illustrate, when Series E attends to the sound that the letters *-ng* record, teachers are told as many as seven times on one manual page to pronounce /ng/. So much for the impossible.

As Table 6 shows, Series E does teach that the *schwa* sound is represented by *a, e, i, o,* or *u*. It also teaches that this is a common sound in unstressed syllables. The problem? Nothing was taught earlier about stressed and unstressed syllables.

Series E is also the only one to point out (three times on one page) that /v/ in final position is recorded by *ve*. Unfortunately, this fact is immediately contradicted on the very same page by a workbook exercise, which states at the top, "The letter *v* stands for the ending sound of the word *five*."

Series E is also unique when it states that *x* in initial position stands for /eks/. This occurs at the K level. Later, at the PP level, *x* is reconsidered in final position. Like the other four series, the blend that *x* stands for in final position (/ks/) is treated as if it were a single sound.

Like Series C, this one misuses terms with considerable frequency. Like Series B and Series D, the manuals tell teachers exactly what to say. Because the text is even more dense than that in Series B, it is difficult to see how any teacher could use the scripts.

Table 7

Materials for Phonics

Series	K and R				PP, P, FR				II[1] and II[2]			
	Number of Exercises*	Percentage for Phonics	Number of Charts	Percentage for Phonics	Number of Exercises	Percentage for Phonics	Number of Charts	Percentage for Phonics	Number of Exercises	Percentage for Phonics	Number of Charts	Percentage for Phonics
A	413	34	122	0	978	38	263	36	956	32	302	55
B	425	40	---	---	682	32	191	67	457	16	195	58
C	340	37	---	---	714	30	273	24	520	16	153	6
D	202	35	---	---	790	36	321	24	476	29	329	37
E	416	30	---	---	823	36	210	16	432	34	87	13

*Number of exercises (workbook pages and blackline masters) only accounts for those shown in manuals. The availability of others is referred to in publishers' descriptions of "supplementary" materials.

Figures

Figure 1. Generalizations Taught in Series A

Level		Letter-Sound Correspondences*
PP	1.	A silent *e* at the end of a word makes the letter a in the middle of the word stand for a long *a* sound. (*date*)
II[1]	2.	When *e, i,* or *y* follows *g*, the *g* is likely to have the soft sound. (*gem, giant, gym*)
	3.	The *schwa* sound can be heard at the beginning of a two-syllable word. The letter *a* stands for the *schwa* sound in words like *alone*.
	4.	The letter *a* stands for the sound heard in the middle of *small* because it is followed by the letter *l*. (*fall, salt, walk, false*)
		Syllabication
II[1]	1.	Two consonants after the first vowel may signal a short sound. (*basket*)
	2.	One consonant after the first vowel may signal a long sound. (*pilot*)
	3.	A consonant followed by *le* forms a syllable. (*candle*)

*Except at the K level, sounds are not directly identified.

Some Commentary: Series A

Generalization #1 listed under "Letter-Sound Correspondences" is useful in explaining why it was difficult at times to know what to call a "generalization." Customarily, generalizations about factors that affect the sounds that vowel letters record are stated so as to encompass *a, e, i, o,* and *u*. One tendency in the examined series, however, is to deal with each vowel separately. Sometimes, but not inevitably, a more encompassing statement eventually appears. Not so with Series A. The statement listed first under "Letter-Sound Correspondences" is used later in the PP manual with *i* (*like*) and in the P manual with *o* (*home*). At no time, however, is the generalization restated to include all five vowel letters.

At no time, either, is a generalization taught to highlight the significance of two successive vowels for pronunciations even though this pattern helps with a large number of words such as *mail, seem, eat, pie, toe,* and *boat*. Instead, as Table 2 showed earlier, decisionmakers for Series A chose to have children memorize various ways to spell long vowel sounds. Children are expected to remember--to cite one example--that /ē/ can be spelled *e, ea, -ee, -ie, -y,* and *-ey*.

Equally puzzling is why the same decisionmakers chose to teach a generalization for the soft sound of *g* but omitted one for *c*, even though soft sounds for the two letters can be referred to with one generalization.

Generalization #4 under "Letter-Sound Correspondences" raises the question, But what about words like *pal, alto,* and *ballot*?

An examination of Figure 1 is likely to raise the question, Why are the first two generalizations listed under "Syllabication" not with those for letter-sound correspondences? The explanation is that both are taught (very briefly) in the context of finding "word-parts" to help with "long word decoding." Generalization #1, for instance, is supposedly taught to help divide *basket* into two syllables.

It was surprising to find, also at the II[1] level, other preparations for decoding "long words" that include such useless advice as telling children that one way to figure out how many syllables are in a word is to "clap as you say the word." (If one can "say the word," is there a need to consider syllables?) It was also disappointing to find advice that was as questionable as, "The first thing you do is look for smaller (presumably "shorter" is intended) familiar words within the bigger (presumably "longer" is intended) one." Here it seems necessary to ask, What will children do when they encounter a word like *amuse* and see the familiar words *am* and *use*?

Given that Series A teaches that the *schwa* sound is spelled with *a* and appears initially in words like *away*, another question has to be raised about the problems children might have pronouncing the final syllable in words such as *candle* and *rifle,*. (These words relate to Generalization #3 under "Syllabication.") In fairness to Series A, it should be added that Series C teaches the same generalization for syllabicating unknown words even though it never even acknowledges the existence of the *schwa* sound.

Figure 2. Generalizations Taught in Series B

Level		Letter-Sound Correspondences*
PP	1.	When a word has a vowel between two consonants, the vowel sound will usually be short. (*hop*)
P	2.	When a word has a consonant, vowel, another consonant, and final *e*, the first vowel letter usually stands for the long vowel sound. (*date*)
	3.	When a word ends with a silent *e*, the first vowel usually stands for its long sound. (*date*)
	4.	When the letters *ow* are at the end of a word, they can stand for the long *o* vowel sound. (*low*)
FR	5.	When the letter *e* is the only vowel and it comes at the end of a word, it stands for the long *e* vowel sound. (*me*)
II[1]	6.	When the letters *e, i,* or *y* come after *g*, try the soft *g* sound. (*gem, giant, gym*)
	7.	When the letters *e*, *i*, or *y* come after the letter *c*, try the soft sound for *c*. (*cent, city, cycle*)
II[2]	8.	When a word has more than one syllable and the first letter is *a*, the first syllable is unstressed and its vowel sound is called *schwa*. (*alone*)
	9.	The *schwa* sound is the sound of the vowel in a syllable that is unstressed. (*alone*)
		Syllabication
II[1]	1.	A compound word can be divided into syllables by first dividing it into the two words that form the compound word. (*pancake*)
II[2]	2.	When a word has a double consonant between two vowels, the word is often divided into syllables between the double consonants. (*window*)
	3.	When words have two consonants in the middle followed by *er*, the word is usually divided between the two consonants. (*la^dder*)
	4.	Words that begin with *a* followed by a consonant and another vowel are often divided into syllables after the *a*. (*alone*)

*Sounds are not directly identified.

Some Commentary: Series B

To expedite reacting to Figure 2, comments will simply be listed. (Some of the content was discussed before.) The numbers below refer to the numbers in Figure 2.

Letter-Sound Correspondences

3. This generalization, described as new instruction, duplicates the one listed directly above it, which is taught 52 pages earlier in the same manual. Because helpful generalizations focus on visual cues, the reference to "a silent *e*" is questionable.

5. This generalization, taught in the context of ways to spell /ē/, raises a question that examining the various series commonly provoked: What *is* a generalization? Stated differently, why wasn't a more encompassing, thus more helpful, generalization taught--for instance, When a vowel letter is the only vowel in a syllable and it is at the end of the syllable, it commonly stands for its long sound? This would take care of words like *me* and *no* but also others such as *silo, alto, bacon, future, music,* and *legal*.

6, 7. These generalizations suggest once more the failure to make comparisons when it is helpful to do so. Specifically, what has traditionally been called the "hard" sounds for *g* and *c* are not referred to when the two additional sounds and the two generalizations (#6 and #7) are taught.

8. Problems with this generalization have been discussed. Words like *after, accent,* and *argue* suggest a deficiency in how the generalization is stated.

Syllabication

1. This statement illustrates why some of the generalizations that basal series have taught over the years are criticized: They are useless for decoding unknown words. The question that this generalization prompts is, If a child can read *pan* and *cake*, is there any need to consider how *pancake* should be divided into syllables?

3. This generalization is presented in a section described as review for "the unaccented syllable /ər/." It is a restatement of the generalization listed above it in Figure 2. It is also less encompassing, thus less helpful, than the earlier statement.

4. This generalization is in a manual segment described as a review of stressed and unstressed syllables and the vowel sound /ə/. Although the segment does review the vowel sound in the unstressed syllable of a word like *alone*, the generalization in Figure 2 receives equal attention. Its appearance in a review segment was unexpected, as it received no attention earlier in the program.

Figure 3. Generalizations Taught in Series C*

Level		Letter-Sound Correspondences
PP	1.	The consonant *c* can stand for two different sounds, the one at the beginning of *circle* and the other at the beginning of *can*. When *c* is followed by *e* or *i*, it will probably sound like the first *c* in *circle*.
	2.	The vowel has a short sound in a consonant, vowel, consonant (CVC) word. (*hop*)
	3.	Help children notice that when the vowel is at the end of a CV word, it is long. (*me*)
P	4.	Many times, the letters *gh* are silent. (*light*)
	5.	In a CVCe word like *cake*, the first vowel stands for a long vowel sound and the *e* is silent.
FR	6.	If *r* comes after the letters *oo*, try the sound as in *door*.
	7.	Explain to children that when a vowel is followed by the consonant *r*, the sound of the vowel changes. (*horn*)
		Syllabication
P	1.	Words with the VCCV pattern divide into parts between the consonants. (*window*)
FR	2.	When a word ends with a consonant followed by *le*, the word is divided into syllables before the consonant. (*candle*)
II[1]	3.	The letters *a* and *be* begin many words and they are often syllables. (*alone*, *below*)

*Sounds are not directly identified except when ph = /f/ is taught in II[1]. Series C ends phonics instruction at the II[1] level.

Some Commentary: Series C

As Figure 3 shows, those responsible for Series C chose to deal early with the two common sounds for *c*. The fact that the first sound that gets attention (*c* = /k/) is reviewed when the second sound (c = /s/) is introduced is commendable and also unusual for the series examined. More typical is a discrete consideration of topics. Less praiseworthy in Series C is the choice of *circle* to illustrate the second sound for *c*. Why a word like *cent* wasn't used is among a large number of questions prompted by all five series that have no obvious answers. Adding to the number of such questions is one that asks, Why does Series C omit attention to the two common sounds for *g*?

Series C is the only program that teaches all three vowel sounds for y: /ē/, /ī/, and /ĭ/. Yet, as Figure 3 suggests through omissions, no generalizations are taught to help children know when to expect each sound. In fact, they are not even told when y functions as a consonant (when it occurs at the beginning of a syllable) and when it serves as a vowel. When the vowel sounds /ē/ and /ī/ for y are taught at the PP level, the only advice given to children is, "Try both sounds." How to do this with unknown words is never modeled and blending is not taught. Consequently, it is unlikely that the advice will be helpful--or even meaningful.

As Figure 3 points out, Series C teaches about the CV pattern and its significance for the likely sound of the vowel. (See the third generalization listed under "Letter-Sound Correspondences.") However, when this program deals with visual cues that help decoders divide words like *candle* into syllables (*can dle*), nothing is said about the pronunciation of consonant-*l*-*e* syllables even though they have "one vowel at the end." Obviously, teaching about words like *candle* is one of the many times when attention should have gone to the *schwa* sound; but, as stated before, authors of Series C chose to ignore it.

Why the authors did choose to attend to Generalization #3 listed in Figure 3 under "Syllabication" is questionable when words like *absent* and *better* are recalled. Interestingly, words that do illustrate the generalization commonly have the *schwa* sound in the initial syllable.

Figure 4. Generalizations Taught in Series D

Level		Letter-Sound Correspondences*
PP	1.	When you see two of the same consonant letters together, they stand for one sound. (*pass*)
FR	3.	When a word has two parts and the last letter is *y*, the *y* usually stands for the /ē/ sound. (*happy*)
	4.	When a word has letter *u*, followed by a consonant, and letter *e* is at the end of the word, the letter *u* can stand for the /o͞o/ sound. This is the long sound of letter *u*. (*rule*)
	5.	When a word has letter *u* followed by a consonant, letter *u* can stand for the /yo͞o/ sound. This is the long sound of letter *u*. (*cube*)
II[1]	6.	The letter *c* stands for the /s/ sound when it is followed by *e, i,* or *y*. (*cent, city, cycle*)
	7.	When the letter *g* is followed by *e, i,* or *y*, the *g* stands for the /j/ sound. (*gem, giant, gym*)
	8.	When a vowel is followed by a consonant and ends with *e*, the vowel has the long sound. (*date*)
II[2]	9.	When a vowel is at the end of the first syllable of a two-syllable word, the vowel usually stands for its long sound. (*pilot*)
		Syllabication
		No generalizations taught.

*Sounds are directly identified.

Some Commentary: Series D

Of all the series examined, the introductory pages in Series D manuals offer the greatest promises insofar as phonics is concerned. In addition, pages within the manuals refer repeatedly to its importance. Yet, as Figure 4 shows, a wide gap exists between what is promised and what is delivered. Once more the question is, Who makes the promises and who prepares the manuals?

Much of what Series D does teach about letter-sound correspondences cannot be called generalizations. Instead, the summary statements that appear regularly in manuals single out some special collection of letters and the sounds they represent. Among these summary statements are the following:

The letters *-tch* at the end of a word stand for the /ch/ sound.

When a word ends with *-mb*, the *b* is silent.

When the letters *wr* are together, they stand for the /r/ sound.

When the letters *-igh* are together, they commonly stand for the /$\bar{i}$/ sound.

All such statements were accounted for earlier in Table 5.

It should be noted, too, that opportunities to teach generalizations are commonly bypassed in Series D. To illustrate, at the R level, teachers are told in the scripted manual to teach that two successive *e*'s stand for the /$\bar{e}$/ sound. In the same lesson, they are supposed to explain that "the letters *ea* together" also stand for the /$\bar{e}$/ sound. In no manual, however, does attention go to the spelling pattern CVVC and its significance for making decisions about vowel sounds even though it takes care of words like *meet* and *each*.

The one generalization for letter-sound correspondences that is taught at the PP level in this series has to be questioned when words like *success* and *suggest* are considered. The same two words prompt the question--again one without any obvious answer--Why are no generalizations taught in Series D for dividing unknown words into syllables? This is a serious omission, given the fact that some of the generalizations that this program teaches for letter-sound correspondences assume that children know how to divide unknown words into syllables.

Figure 5. Generalizations Taught in Series E

Level		Letter-Sound Correspondences*
PP	1.	An *e* at the end of a word does not say anything, and it makes the other vowel in the word say the long sound. (*date*)
	2.	When *y* is the only vowel in a word and it comes at the end of one-part words, it stands for the long *i* sound. (*by*)
	3.	When there are two consonants at the end of a word that are the same, they stand for only one consonant sound. (*tell*)
	4.	When a one-part word has one vowel letter at the end, it usually stands for its long sound. (*me*)
P	5.	When there are two vowel letters together, the first probably stands for a long vowel sound and the second will be silent. (*boat*)
	6.	When the letter *c* comes before *e, i,* or *y,* it usually has the /s/ sound. (*cent, city, cycle*)
FR	7.	When the letter *g* comes before *e, i,* or *y,* it usually has the sound /j/. (*gem, giant, gym*)
II[1]	8.	When a word ends with a consonant sound and has only one vowel letter, the vowel letter usually makes a short sound. (*hop*)
	9.	When *c* comes before *a, o, u,* or another consonant, it usually stands for /k/. (*cat, cow, cup*)
	10.	When *g* comes before *a, o, u,* or another consonant, it usually stands for /g/. (*game, go, gum*)
		Syllabication
II[1]	1.	Counting the number of vowel sounds in a word tells you the number of syllables in the word.
II[2]	2.	Words that have a double consonant in the middle can be divided into syllables between the consonants. (*window*)
	3.	When a word ends with a consonant followed by *le*, the consonant plus *le* is the final syllable. (*candle*)

*Sounds are directly identified.

Some Commentary: Series E

As was done with Series B, the reactions below refer to the numbers in Figure 5.

Letter-Sound Correspondences

2. This series teaches that *y* can be a vowel and, as such, can stand for /ī/. (A review segment states it can stand for /ē/; however, no instruction preceded the review.) Unlike the other four series, this one encourages teachers to remind children that *y* is also a consonant and illustrates this with *yellow*. Unfortunately, suggestions to help them know when *y* functions as a consonant and when it serves as a vowel are absent.

4. All the manual segments in Series E that deal with this generalization--those concerned with both instruction and review--use *e* as "the vowel letter at the end." Later, however, it is presupposed that children know that *o* represents its long sound in *ago* when this word is used to illustrate the occurrence of the *schwa* sound in an unstressed syllable. (Unfortunately, nothing was taught earlier about stressed and unstressed syllables.)

9. The correspondences between *c* and /k/ and *g* and /g/ are taught in the K manual. Subsequently, both sounds are reviewed many times. Nevertheless, the generalization about these correspondences is not taught until Grade 2. On the other hand, even though the soft sounds for *c* and *g* are taught later, the generalization about them is taught earlier.

Syllabication

1. Like Series A, this one is still teaching in Grade 2 that the number of syllables in a word can be determined by clapping. As Figure 5 shows, Series E also continues to teach at the same level that counting the vowel sounds in a word tells how many syllables it has. It is generalizations like these that have been the target of much justified criticism over a long period of time, because they assume that children can read the words being considered.

2. All the series examined sometimes offer inappropriate illustrative words. In the case of this generalization, illustrative words include *basket* and *window* but also *little* even though the latter has three successive consonants.

One final point needs to be made about a generalization for syllabication that is *not* listed in Figure 5. I refer to the spelling pattern VCV, suggesting a division between the first vowel and the following consonant, as in *even* and *wafer*. The point to be made is that the generalization is used in the II^2 manual in Series E even though it is not taught until the III^2 level.